

Book Review

Translation Quality Assessment: Past and Present

Juliane House

Routledge: London and New York 2015 pp. 160

The author of this book is probably one of the most important figures in the world of translation today and the book provides a highly readable overview of interdisciplinary research on translation, acknowledging the importance of the socio-cultural and situational contexts in which texts are embedded.

This is a newly revised model of translation quality assessment which relies on detailed textual and culturally informed analysis and comparison. The chapters move from the basic question of ‘What is translation?’ through the various approaches that people have taken to translation; the original model proposed by House and its various modifications over a period of nearly 40 years and finally a more integrative model. Basically what House proposes is a two step approach to translation: firstly analysis, description and explanation; secondly, judgment of value, socio-cultural relevance and appropriateness.

For readers acquainted with Baker’s work (2006, 2010), will find the approach of systemic functional linguistic theory (Halliday (2015) very familiar. In fact this revised model moves even more towards such an approach with added discussions on contrastive pragmatics, intercultural communication as well as cognitive aspects.

Prominence is given to ‘Globalization’, ‘Corpus studies’ and ‘Genre’ expanding on House’s previous models. For researchers and translators in Asia and South-east Asia the discussion on globalization will be of particular interest.

As House writes: 'Since the prime aim of any lingua franca communication is mutual intelligibility...correctness tends not to be an important criterion...Equally non- important in ELF use is what generations of learners of English have both dreaded and unsuccessfully imitated: culturally embedded, typical English forms such as idioms or other routinized phrases full of insider cultural-historical references invariably based on national tradition, convention or class.'

In chapter 10 House discusses Corpus studies and their relevance to 'Genre' in translation. Corpus studies allow the results of analysis of individual texts to be raised to a more general level that make the outcomes more inter-subjectively reliable and valid. Thus, equivalence in translation can be made open to generalizations by verification using parallel translation corpora employing different genre and comparable corpora in the target language.

Chapter 12 outlines what is described as: 'Towards a New Integrative Model of Translation Quality Assessment'. The diagrammatic representation summarizes much of what was explained in Chapters 8-11. As indicated at the beginning of this review, the model follows Halliday's approach to textual analysis with Field/Tenor/Mode giving us the Register, while the generic purpose comes in the Genre at a wider social level than Register. It is in this area of the types of genre being employed that might be more difficult to define in translations. Indeed, House sees Corpus work as giving 'empirical substance' to what she terms the 'vague notion of Genre'.

House is an Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Hamburg in Germany. This is reflected in the fact that many of the sample texts analyzed are in German. I don't think this detracts from the analysis presented in the book. In fact these 'worked out' examples are particularly helpful as they act as a bridge between the theoretical base and the practical application. Consequently, I can only endorse what is written in the blurb. 'There simply is no rival...'

Reference

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- Baker, M (ed.) 2010. *Critical Readings in Translation Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Halliday, M.A.K and C.M.I.M Matthiessen. 2014. *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (4th ed.). London: Routledge
- Halliday, M.A.K. 2008. *Complementaries of Language*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.

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